



Syllabus for Introduction to Philosophy

Course Information

Semester & Year: Fall 2021

Course ID & Section #: PHIL-10-E1953

Instructor's name: Austin Roberts

Day/Time: TTH, 2:50-4:15pm

Location: HU215

Course units: 3

Instructor Contact Information

Zoom Office hours or chats by arrangement through email request.

Email address: austin-roberts@redwoods.edu

Catalog Description

An introduction to the central and enduring philosophical problems and the arguments historical and contemporary philosophers have made about them. Topics to be addressed include epistemology; metaphysics; the relation between the mind and the body; the nature of free will; the existence of God; the foundations of morality; aesthetics; and social justice. Emphasis is on using methods of philosophic inquiry to develop and defend individual responses to perennial questions.

Course Student Learning Outcomes *(from course outline of record)*

1. Apply the methods of philosophical inquiry to philosophical questions.
2. Evaluate the theories & arguments of major philosophers in response to central and enduring philosophic questions.

Prerequisites/co-requisites/ recommended preparation

None

Accessibility

College of the Redwoods is committed to making reasonable accommodations for qualified students with disabilities. If you have a disability or believe you might benefit from disability-related services and accommodations, please contact your instructor or [Disability Services and Programs for Students](#) (DSPS). Students may make requests for alternative media by contacting DSPS based on their campus location:

- Eureka: 707-476-4280, student services building, 1st floor
- Del Norte: 707-465-2324, main building near library
- Klamath-Trinity: 530-625-4821 Ext 103

If you are taking online classes DSPS will email approved accommodations for distance education classes to your instructor. In the case of face-to-face instruction, please present your written accommodation request to your instructor at least one week before the needed accommodation so that necessary arrangements can be made. Last minute arrangements or post-test adjustments usually cannot be accommodated.

Introduction to Philosophy

Philosophy begins in wonder. And, at the end, when philosophic thought has done its best, the wonder remains.

—Alfred North Whitehead

A philosopher is a lover of wisdom. It takes tremendous discipline, it takes tremendous courage to think for yourself, to examine yourself.

—Cornel West

Course Information

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PHIL 10

Course Units:

3

Year and Semester:

Fall 2021

Prerequisites:

None

Meeting Day/Time:

TTH, 2:50-4:15pm

Location:

HU215

Instructor Information

Instructor:

Dr. Austin Roberts

Email:

austin-roberts@redwoods.edu

Zoom Office Hours: By appointment

Course Materials

Required Textbook:

The Big Questions, 10th edition (ISBN: 978-1305955448)

Robert Solomon & Kathleen Higgins, Cengage, 2017

Available to rent from online bookstores (\$22+)

OR purchase used/new from online bookstores (\$45+)



Additional Required Readings: available on Canvas

Computer Requirements:

Internet access and MS Word compatible software

Students can obtain a free Office 365 license with a valid CR

email: <https://www.redwoods.edu/Services/Office365>

Canvas Information:

Login to Canvas at <https://redwoods.instructure.com>

Password is your 8-digit birth date

For tech help, email its@redwoods.edu or call 707-476-4160

Canvas Help for students:

<https://www.redwoods.edu/online/Help-Student>

Course Description and Objectives

This course aims to introduce “philosophy,” the “love of wisdom,” into our lives. What are the most important questions we can ask in life? How should we think about these questions? What kinds of answers might we give to them? How do we make sure our answers become embodied in our actions? As your instructor, one of my deepest convictions is that all of you are fully capable of becoming philosophers. For to be human is already to be, at the very least, *a philosopher in the making*—that is, someone with ideas about the world around us and about who we are as humans. These ideas ultimately constitute our individual worldviews, which constantly guide our thinking and actions. Your worldview might be religious or secular, liberal or conservative, capitalist or socialist, hopeful or pessimistic, and so on. At its best, philosophy enables us to critically examine our worldviews and to seriously consider the possible truth of other perspectives.

Following the Socratic assertion that “*the unexamined life is not worth living*,” this course will give you an opportunity to delve into your own philosophy of life, to bring your ideas and unconscious assumptions “into the light,” and to look at them in new ways in conversation with others. This will require patience, courage, open-mindedness, and a commitment to deep reflection on matters of ultimate significance. Throughout this semester, we will be grappling with some of the biggest questions in life about meaning, values, religion, reality, truth, freedom, justice, and more. We will explore the ideas of numerous influential philosophers and thinkers, from Plato and Friedrich Nietzsche, to Martin Luther King Jr. and Simone de Beauvoir. We will examine the ways such thinkers perceived the world, and what actions their philosophies may support and inspire. In the end, the goal of this course is for you to be able to answer for yourself the following questions: “What is wisdom for me? And how will my life pursue it?”

1. Course Objectives: Upon completion of this course, the student will be able to:

- a. Demonstrate a basic understanding of philosophical methods.
- b. Demonstrate an ability to articulate ideas about philosophical issues.
- c. Use philosophical methods, assumptions & principles to analyze philosophical ideas and positions.
- d. Evaluate philosophical arguments, methods, assumptions, and principles for consistency, relevance, and truth.

2. Methods of Instruction: In most of our weekly class meetings, this course will blend lectures, digital media, class discussions, and various writing and small group activities.

Course Schedule

This schedule may change depending on time and other factors. Beyond our main textbook (Solomon/Higgins, *The Big Questions*), additional readings are on Canvas under Files.

Week One (August 24 & 26):

Topics: *Class Introductions; Introducing Philosophy*

Readings: 1—Solomon/Higgins, Preface and Introduction (1-14)

2—Russell, “Value of Philosophy” (short excerpt)

⇒ *Student Survey due by August 26th at 2:40pm*

Week Two (August 31 & September 2):

Topics: *Logic; Philosophical Questions*

Readings: 1—Solomon/Higgins, A Little Logic (14-22)

2—Solomon/Higgins, Chapter 1

Week Three (September 7 & 9):

Topic: *Existentialism & the Meaning of Life*

Readings: 1—Solomon/Higgins, Chapter 2

2—Scranton, “We’re Doomed. Now What?” (short article)

3—James & Camus, “How is Life Meaningful?” (excerpts)

Week Four (September 14 & 16):

Questions: *What do we mean by “God”? What is the problem of evil?*

Readings: 1—Solomon/Higgins, Chapter 3 (64-85)

2—Rubenstein, “Cosmic Pantheism” (short article)

3—Caputo, “God Is Not A Supreme Being”

Week Five (September 21 & 23):

Question: *Is it rational to believe in God?*

Readings: 1—Solomon/Higgins, Chapter 3 (85-94)

2—Vaughn, “Paley and Hume on Design Arguments” (excerpts w/commentary)

3—Clayton, “Religion and Science Debate”

Week Six (September 28 & 30):

Question: *What is the nature of reality? (part 1)*

Readings: 1—Solomon/Higgins, Chapter 4 (105-top of 121)

2—Mesle, “Process-Relational Philosophy (part 1)”

Week Seven (October 5 & 7):

Question: *What is the nature of reality? (part 2)*

Readings: 1—Solomon/Higgins, Chapter 4 (121-127 & 132-137)

2—Mesle, “Process-Relational Philosophy (part 2)”

Week Eight (October 12 & 14):

Mid-Semester Discussion & Review (Tuesday); ONLINE MIDTERM exam (Thursday)

Week Nine (October 19 & 21):**Questions:** *What is truth? Can we ever really know anything?***Readings:** Solomon/Higgins, Chapter 5 (141-161) and Chapter 4 (127-top of 131)**Week Ten (October 26 & 28):****Topic:** *Eastern & Western Philosophies of the Self***Readings:** 1—Solomon/Higgins, Chapter 6 (183-189, 194-196, 203-209)

2—Sartre, “Existentialism is a Humanism”

3—Dalai Lama, “Emptiness” (short excerpt)

Week Eleven (November 2 & 4):**Topic:** *Philosophies of Mind & Panpsychism***Readings:** 1—Solomon/Higgins, Chapter 6 (196-203)

2—Sheldrake, “Is Matter Unconscious?”

3—Goff, “[Consciousness](#)” (short article)**Week Twelve (November 9):****Question:** *What is freedom? Are we free to choose?***Reading:** Solomon/Higgins, Chapter 7**Week Thirteen (November 16 & 18):****Question:** *What is the right thing to do?***Readings:** 1—Solomon/Higgins, Chapter 8 (pages 248-top of 251 and bottom of 255-278)

2—Chaffee & King, “Religion, Morality, and Civil Disobedience”

⇒ Philosopher Essay due by Saturday, November 20th**Week Fourteen (November 22–26):***FALL BREAK***Week Fifteen (November 30 & December 2):****Question:** *What makes a society just?***Readings:** 1—Solomon/Higgins, Chapter 9 (284-311)

2—Chaffee, “Rawls and Marx on Social Justice”

3—“[What Is Democratic Socialism?](#)” (short article)**Week Sixteen (December 7 & 9):***Final Discussion & Review (Tuesday); ONLINE FINAL exam (Thursday)***Week Seventeen (December 14):**⇒ Reflection #4: End-of-semester reflection due by December 14th

Course Requirements and Grading

Requirements:

- *Participation*: 20%
- *Canvas Reflections*: 30%
- *Philosopher Essay*: 20% (November 20th)
- *Midterm Exam*: 15% (October 14th)
- *Final Exam*: 15% (December 9th)

Grading Scale: 95%—100% = A; 90—94% = A-; 87%—89% = B+; 84%—86% = B; 80%—83% = B-; 75%—79% = C+; 70%—74% = C; 60%—69% = D; 59% or below = F

Assignment Details

-Participation: Succeeding in this class will depend on your participation and attendance. Classroom participation includes actively listening, taking notes, contributing to class discussions, participating in small group work, and occasionally taking short pop quizzes on the reading assignments. Anyone who distinguishes themselves by contributing significantly to classroom discussions may receive extra points for doing so. Note that being consistently late or leaving class early will affect your participation grade. You are allowed two unexcused absences during the semester, beyond which your participation grade will be negatively impacted. Officially documented medical, legal, or bereavement absences are of course excused. Excused absences allow you to make up missed work.

-Canvas Reflections: At the start of most weeks, you will need to submit a reading reflection on Canvas. Most reflections have a 150-word minimum word count. By the end of the semester, you will need to have submitted 12 reflections, and you will have 13 opportunities to do so. Some reflections have very specific writing prompts; others have open-ended prompts. The purpose of these reflections is two-fold: 1) to work out your thoughts about the readings in a concise manner; and 2) to prepare yourself for class discussions about the readings. If you respond to the correct writing prompts, write clearly and thoughtfully, and list the word count at the top of your reflections, you will receive full credit for each reflection that you turn in on time. While I will read all of your reflections, written feedback will be limited. However, I may ask you to share your questions/comments from your reflections in small group or whole-class discussions. As such, always bring your most pressing questions/comments from your written reflections into class with you each week. Due dates: See Canvas Modules for due dates for each reading response. Most reflections are due by 10:00am on *Tuesdays*. A few reflections will be due by 10:00am on *Thursdays*. Submission process: under “Assignments,” scroll to “Canvas Reflections,” click on the reflection that is due, read and follow the assignment directions, and upload your reflection as a Word or PDF document.

Extra Credit: You need to submit 12 of 13 reflections this semester for credit (i.e., 30% of your final grade). If you submit all 13 reflections, you can receive 5% extra credit on your final grade.

-Exams (Midterm, Oct. 14th; Final, Dec. 9th): There will be two online exams to ensure your understanding of the course material. Both will be primarily multiple choice, and they will be based on the readings and lectures up to that point in the semester. The final will not be cumulative. *Prior to each exam, I will distribute study guides and we will have a review session so that you know what to expect.* You can begin preparing for the exams by keeping up on the readings, taking good notes, and participating in class.

-Philosopher Essay (due by November 20): For your major writing assignment, you will need to choose one of the ‘big questions’ that we are discussing this semester, and then write a paper about how one philosopher answers that question. Feel free to go beyond the questions and philosophers we will study in

class, but you must clear your choice with me if they are not discussed in our readings. Topic examples: the answers of Plato, Descartes, or Whitehead to the question, “what is the nature of reality?”; the answers of Locke, the Buddha, or Sartre to the question, “what is the self?”; the answers of Kierkegaard, Anselm, or Nietzsche to the question, “does God exist?”; the answers of Kant, Bentham, or Aristotle to the question, “what is the right thing to do?”; and so on. In your opening paragraph, indicate the ‘big question’ and the philosopher you are writing about, and state your thesis (i.e., whether you will criticize or defend the philosopher’s answer to the big question). Your paper should also include a short overview of the philosopher’s biography (~1/2-1 page) and an overview of their main contributions to philosophy (~1/2-1 page). Most importantly, the remainder of your essay should be devoted to your explanation and evaluation of the philosopher’s response to one of the ‘big questions’ (~3-5 pages). The essay should be between 1400-1800 words (see “*Essay Format*” below), and it must contain a bibliography with at least three different sources on your subject beyond our textbook. Wikipedia *cannot* be used as one of your sources. In addition to the CR library’s online research database, two good online sources include The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy and The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. Additionally, scholarly sources are listed at the end of each chapter of our textbook.

***Essay Format:** 1400-1800 words, 12-point font, double spaced, with 1-inch margins. Part of your essay grade will depend on whether you follow these instructions. When you cite sources in your essay, I will accept any professional format (e.g., Harvard, APA, Chicago, MLA). Essays must include a bibliography.

Disclaimer Regarding Changes: The instructor reserves the right to change or alter this syllabus as necessary.

Course Policies

Attendance:

Students are expected to be punctual and attend all courses in which they are enrolled. Regular attendance is important for satisfactory academic progress. If you are not regularly attending class, this will have an impact on your participation grade. You may be dropped from the class as a result of frequent unexcused absences.

Late Work:

Late work will receive point reductions, and only be accepted from students who have requested to turn work in late *prior* to its due date. Work turned in more than a week late will not be accepted unless the student and instructor have come to an agreement beforehand in verifiable communication. Late philosopher essays are immediately lowered 10%. For each successive 24-hour period that they are late, essays will continue to be lowered 10%. Late Canvas Reflections are lowered 1 point. I will read late work when possible, but students may receive very limited feedback. If you turn work in late, know that I might not be able to read and grade it until much later in the term, perhaps even the last week of the semester. *Exceptions to this late work policy will of course be made for officially documented medical, legal, or bereavement absences.*

Student Conduct:

Our classroom should be a safe learning environment. Students are expected to treat the instructor and each other with respect. Please avoid making sarcastic comments in class, which tend to shut down otherwise productive discussions. Student behavior or speech that disrupts the instructional setting will not be tolerated. Disruptive conduct may include, but is not limited to: unwarranted interruptions; failure to adhere to instructor’s directions; obscene language; slurs or other forms of intimidation; and physically or verbally

abusive behavior. In such cases where the instructor determines that a student has disrupted the educational process, a disruptive student may be temporarily removed from class.

Nondiscrimination Statement:

In accordance with College of the Redwoods Board Policy AP3410, discrimination or harassment based on national origin, religion, age, gender, gender identity, race or ethnicity, color, medical condition, physical or mental disability, sexual orientation, or marital status is prohibited in any form. All individuals are to be respected and treated with dignity and civility. Students are encouraged to participate fully in class discussions and to engage other students and the instructor in a professional and respectful manner.

Academic Dishonesty:

In the academic community, the high value placed on truth implies a corresponding intolerance of scholastic dishonesty. Acts of academic dishonesty include, but are not limited to, cheating, tampering, fabricating, plagiarizing, or assisting others in an act of academic dishonesty. Plagiarism is defined as representing someone else's words, ideas, artistry, or data as one's own, including copying another person's work without appropriate referencing; presenting someone else's opinions and theories as one's own; or working jointly on a project, then submitting it as one's own. In cases involving academic dishonesty, determination of the grade and of the student's status in the course is left primarily to the discretion of the faculty member. In such cases, where the instructor determines that a student has demonstrated academic dishonesty, the student may receive a failing grade for the assignment and/or exam and may be reported to the Chief Student Services Officer.

Special accommodations statement:

College of the Redwoods complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act in making reasonable accommodations for qualified students with disabilities. If you have a disability or believe you might benefit from disability-related services and accommodations, please email me or contact Disability Services and Programs for Students. Students may make requests for alternative media by contacting DSPS at 707-476-4280. All information and documentation are confidential.

Fall 2021 admissions deadlines & enrollment policies:

- *Classes begin: 8/21/21*
- *Last day to add a class: 8/27/21*
- *Last day to drop without a W and receive a refund: 9/03/21*
- *Labor Day Holiday (all campuses closed): 09/06/21*
- *Census date: 9/07/21 or 20% into class duration*
- *Last day to petition to graduate or apply for certificate: 10/28/21*
- *Last day for student-initiated W (no refund): 10/29/21*
- *Last day for faculty-initiated W (no refund): 10/29/21*
- *Veteran's Day (all campuses closed): 11/11/21*
- *Fall Break (no classes): 11/22/21 – 11/26/21*
- *Thanksgiving Holiday (all campuses closed): 11/24/21 – 11/26/21*
- *Final examinations: 12/11/21 – 12/17/21*
- *Last day to petition to file P/NP option: 12/17/21*
- *Semester ends: 12/17/21*
- *Grades available for transcript release: approximately 01/07/22*

Cell Phone and Recording Policies:

PLEASE TURN YOUR CELL PHONES OFF (OR TO SILENT MODE) DURING CLASS. Use of a cell phone, smart phone, or similar device during class can be considered a classroom disruption and may result in the student being dismissed from the class for the day. If there is an urgent need to have a cell phone or messaging device turned on during class (such as for a medical, family, or child-care emergency), set the device to vibrate and step outside of the classroom to answer the call with a minimum of disturbance to the class. Audio/video recording of lectures is only permitted for students with proper DSPS forms, and for the student's *individual use only*. Recordings may *not* be shared online. Cameras may not be used during classroom meetings without instructor approval.

Essay Submission Policy:

Essays must be submitted over Canvas. In general, I do not accept printed essays.

Course Withdrawal:

To be dropped from the class, it is the student's responsibility to drop online through WebAdvisor or through the Admissions and Records Office. Do not assume you will be dropped if you stop participating in class. If you stop participating and fail to drop the class by the last drop date (9/3/21), it is possible that you will receive an F in the course.

Community College Student Health and Wellness

Resources, tools, and trainings regarding health, mental health, wellness, basic needs and more designed for California community college students, faculty and staff are available on the California Community Colleges [Health & Wellness website](#). [Wellness Central](#) is a free online health and wellness resource that is available 24/7 in your space at your pace. Students seeking to request a counseling appointment for academic advising or general counseling can email counseling@redwoods.edu

COVID Classroom Protocols

Masks are required for all students in the classroom. A student's refusal to comply with COVID classroom protocols is grounds for dismissal from the classroom. Students may choose to bring their own appropriate cloth face covering or surgical face masks, and these masks must be worn at all times in the indoor classroom, other public indoor spaces, and outdoors when gathering with others in groups of more than four. Bandanas, neck gaiters, or 'buffs' are not effective face coverings. The mask must be worn so as to cover both nose and mouth. The mask should not have an exhalation valve or vent. This is to help prevent spread of respiratory droplets which may carry disease, even if one is asymptomatic. Students should also maximize the amount of physical distance between themselves and other students. If you have been exposed to COVID-19, are exhibiting symptoms of COVID-19, or have tested positive for COVID-19, you should immediately let me know, self-quarantine, and not attend class sessions. For the sake of heightened classroom hygiene, students should avoid touching their eyes, nose, and mouth. *This includes no eating in the classroom*. Students should wash/sanitize hands after interactions with others and/or entering or leaving class.